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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the role, training, and impact of the Research for Better Schools Field Consultants who operated in the network of school districts during 1972-73. The role model utilized was a modification of several interventionist/change models from the literature on change. Inasmuch as a change agent's role is to facilitate organizational change through assistance with problemsolving, decisionmaking, and decision implementation, the Field Consultant performed a linkage role between research and development and product users, providing training and technical assistance in product implementation and diffusion. The training of the Field Consultant was designed to develop competencies in establishing and maintaining working relationships with clients, training teachers and administrators, effectively diagnosing and prescribing for difficulties of implementation, and studying change related phenomena. The impact of the consultant role was measured by feedback from clients and by studies conducted on problems related to impelementation of innovations. A short list of references is included. (Author)

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IMPLEMENTING CHANGE IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS:

A Description of the Role, Training, and Field Impact of the RBS Field Consultant

by

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the consulting function has become a business of extraordinary proportions. Consulting firms, specializing in helping individuals, groups, and organizations to bring about improvement through planned change, advise most of America's top business and government organizations.

The strategies employed by such firms to assist organizations in their efforts to change are highly sophisticated and complex, and far-reaching in impact on the nature and quality of management in today's organizations. And yet, one is hard pressed to find these experienced management consultants carrying out definitive research on the influence of the consultant role on change. Such research is sorely needed if educational consultants, who are fairly new to the game, are to be able to adopt and adapt change strategies to some of the problems faced in school practice.

One can, fortunately, turn to social scientists and educators currently studying the professional role of the consultant to discover how this advisor is made -- what skills, competencies, habits of mind, and personality are necessary to the individual playing the "helper" role. Argyris; Bennis, Benne, and Chin; Havelock and his associates, and Lippitt and his have all been making contributions to this exploration for fifteen years and more. To them we owe such terms as change agent, interventionist, client-user, planned change, and so forth. They have

provided us with original insight into the processes facilitating or obfuscating efforts to systematically plan, implement, and evaluate change. And their taxonomies and models have clarified and guided our thinking about the functions, roles, and characteristics of the individual advising others on how to go about initiating and carrying out a change program.

Research for Better Schools, Inc. -- an educational laboratory funded by the National Institute of Education and located in Philadelphia -- has, for the past several years, employed a staff of "field consultants" to act as advisors to school practitioners in a network of school districts, providing assistance in training and implementation of curriculum and administrative products.

Setting out to achieve the RBS mission of supporting change in school districts through development, dissemination, and diffusion of curriculum and administrative training products, the consultant has conducted his business with schools with certain assumptions in mind:

1. That innovative products which individualize and personalize instruction for children are a first priority need in schools;

2. That dissemination and diffusion of change can be brought about through the demonstration of effects in a network of school districts;

3. That teachers and administrators want training and support for activities relating to the conduct of change;

4. That a modified change agent/intervention strategy designed both to meet the needs of schools and to serve the purpose of field-oriented inquiry is a viable way to investigate change phenomena.

It was on this last assumption that my work at RBS was focused from 1971 through 1973, and it is on that work experience that the substance of this paper is focused. More specifically, the paper is to describe the roles and functions performed by the RBS Field Consultant, the competencies and skills required of him, the training program employed to develop those competencies and skills, and the impact of the role in the field.

In order to put the role of the Field Consultant into perspective, it is first necessary to describe the RBS Network of School Districts which provided the parameters of the job function.

THE RBS NETWORK OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS

The RBS Network of School Districts was established in 1971 to participate with RBS in various research and development activities. There were, during school year 1972-73, 55 school districts participating in the Network. These districts were selected jointly by RBS, State Departments of Education -- in some cases -- local education departments and school districts themselves. Such factors as diversity in socio-economic status, ethnic make-up, geographic location, apparent innovativeness, and capacity to implement and maintain change over time were the priority considerations in selection of sites.

For RBS, the purposes of having a "network" were to have a set of schools demonstrating successful implementation of RBS curriculum products, providing training sites for new adopters of products, field-testing newly developed curriculum and administrative training products, providing critical input and feedback to developers, and acting as a resource base for research on implementation and planned change.

For Network participants, the benefits of association with RBS included receiving consultant support for training and monitoring the implementation of curriculum products, participating in the development of products designed to improve individualized and personalized instruction, and being on the receiving end of new knowledge about planned change. The role played by the Network in testing, implementing, and diffusing RBS products has been a significant one. Member districts have been critical participants in the research and development effort.

From 1971 through 1973, the functions performed by RBS Field Consultants included providing assistance to individual Network schools and districts in planning and training for the implementation of RBS classroom products; working with central office personnel in pilot and field testing administrative training materials; and carrying out "field-oriented inquiry" as designed and directed by the Administering for Change Program research unit.

Each consultant was responsible for a region of the nation comprising several contiguous states. The number of school districts in a region ranged from four to eight with from one to five schools per district. Any individual school was implementing from two to four curriculum products as well as, in some cases, one or more administrative training programs.

Fifty to 60 percent of Field Consultant "on-site time" was spent on problems related to training teachers and administrators to implement, monitor and evaluate progress of implementation of curriculum products, and assisting personnel with problems related to planning for the expansion or diffusion of programs during school year 1972-73.

In the following pages, the role, training, and impact of the Field Consultant as related to the problems of planned change will be treated.

THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE RBS FIELD CONSULTANT

The role model of the RBS Field Consultant is an amalgam and a modification of "change agent" models from Argyris (1970), Havelock (1973), and Lippitt, Watson and Westley (1958). The change agent (or interventionist), of these writers, directs his energies primarily to broad-scale organizational change. The tasks involve diagnosing the organizational problems; examining goals; acquiring resources/making informed choices; developing commitment in the organization/transforming goals into action; and stabilizing the innovation and generating self-renewal in the client-system.

Following is a graphic presentation of the similarities of the Argyris, Havelock, Lippitt models in role definitions and tasks.

	Argyris (1970)	Havelock (1973)	Lippitt, Watson, Westley (1958)
Term:	interventionist	change agent	change agent
Definition	". . . assists a system to become more effective in problem solving, decision-making, and decision implementation in such a way that the system can continue to be increasingly effective in these activities and have a decreasing need for the intervenor." p 16	a person who facilitates planned change or planned innovation. He is a catalyst, a solution giver, a process helper or a resource linker.	"a professional helper who works with a client system toward a goal of planned change in the function or structure of the system." p 11

continued:	Argyris (1970)	Havelock (1973)	Lippitt, Watson, Westley (1958)
Term:	interventionist	change agent	change agent
Primary Tasks:	1) to generate valid information; 2) to help the client system make informed and responsible choices; 3) to develop internal commitment to these choices.	1) to build a relationship; 2) to diagnose the problem; 3) to acquire relevant resources; 4) to choose the solution; 5) to give acceptance; 6) to stabilize the innovation and generate self-renewal.	1) to clarify or diagnose the client system's problem; 2) to examine alternate goals; 3) to select goals; 4) to transform goals into action.

While the Field Consultant performs some of these same tasks, his role differs from the above models in three important ways: 1) he enters the client-system at a point in time when a decision has been made to implement RBS curriculum or management training products; 2) he works with a select set of schools in the RBS Network of School Districts; and 3) he performs certain functions in the investigation of planned change phenomena.

Working with the Network of School Districts, the RBS Field Consultant acts as an implementation expert, a change agent, and an interventionist with schools and school districts as clients. His role with schools is to enter the system after an adoption decision and provide training. After initial training, his role changes to one of

implementation expert during the first year of operation of the innovation. During the course of this experience, he works with teachers and principals to monitor the degree to which curriculum implementation is in concert with school goals; he provides feedback to the developing agency on problems of implementation; and he writes reports as part of field-oriented inquiry related to the adoption and implementation of change.

His role with school districts relates to diffusion and dissemination of curriculum and management training products. He works with central office personnel in an effort to diagnose system problems related to bringing instructional improvements to schools, to help the client system make informed and responsible choices, and to help in the installation of innovation in the district.

In summary, the role of the RBS Field Consultant is to:

1. Aid teachers, principals, and central office personnel in the adoption, installation, and diffusion of RBS curriculum and management training products designed to individualize and personalize instruction;
2. Study the phenomena of adoption, installation, and diffusion of planned change through products.

He performs tasks of:

1. Training teachers and principals in the use of individualized instruction;
2. Diagnosing problems in product implementation;
3. Providing feedback to users and developers;
4. Aiding school districts with the specification of goals;
5. Aiding principals and central office with decision-making based on evaluative outcomes in coordination with goals;

6. Matching school district needs in "planned change" with administrative training products;

7. Studying the processes of implementing, evaluating, and diffusing change.

THE TRAINING OF THE FIELD CONSULTANT FOR CRITICAL COMPETENCIES

The training program for Field Consultants was designed and implemented by a special staff development team at RBS. The design comprised two instructional phases each with a set of objectives, and specified content and methods for cognitive and experiential learning. The initial training program was one month in duration, with primary emphasis on communication and problem-solving skills.

Before we take a look at the objectives and content of that program, it should be made clear that the organizational unit housing the Field Consultant team is set up to facilitate continuous training throughout the duration of the consultant function. Formal training sessions are held once each month when all consultants are scheduled in-house. The rationale for this treatment is that the output of research and development is constantly changing and the effective consultant must be abreast of this growth and change.

Critical Competencies of the Role

Given the indications of the literature and the special constraints of the role of the Field Consultant, certain competencies and knowledges were determined to be requisite. These skills were then organized into two instructional phases of the training program and implemented using both individualized and group modes.

The topics and objectives presented to develop a knowledge base included:

1. Individualized Instruction, Curricula and Instructional Organization

   Objective: To present the most significant theories of individualized instruction so that they can be related to specific program designs.

   Objective: To apply theories and types of instructional organization to individualized instruction.

2. Techniques of Interaction Dynamics and Problem-Solving:

   Objective: To acquaint staff with techniques group problem analysis and problem-solving.

   Objective: To acquaint staff with principles of small group interaction.

   Objective: To acquaint staff with the principles of analyzing inter-personal factors involved in institutions and organizations.

3. Change Theory

   Objective: To correlate the theories of change to the educational setting.

   Objective: To discuss the sources of and barriers to educational change.

4. School System Management: Comprehensive Planning

   Objective: To present and describe ideas and methods of comprehensive planning for evaluating and changing school systems.

   Objective: To evaluate the methods of comprehensive planning as each relates to a specific type of school.

5. Educational Project Management

   Objective: To acquaint staff with principles and skills of management in educational projects.

6. Re-Training and Continuous Training in Education

   Objective: To provide information to the staff about innovative methods in in-service re-training and continuous training of teachers and administrators.

   Objective: To develop skills to stimulate continuous growth in teachers of IPI with a variety of techniques and designs.

7. Program Evaluation

   Objective: To present evaluation techniques used to assess effectiveness of innovative programs.

   Objective: To present significant research findings on IPI and other individualized programs, and discuss their implications for program change.

Several kinds of resources were employed by the Staff Development Coordinators to achieve the above set of objectives. Developers of curriculum and management training materials participated as instructors in areas of their expertise such as individualized instruction, school management, change theory, and program evaluation. For interpersonal dynamics, a training program developed at a Northwest Regional Lab was implemented on-site, and extra-RBS training consultants were employed. A special project developed by Dr. Glen Heathers -- Training for Leadership in Local Educational Change -- provided a knowledge base in the design and conduct of local educational improvement programs.

This phase of training was augmented by literature resources on educational funding strategies, methods of consultant interaction with client systems, and on competing innovative products in the field.

The second phase of the training dealt more specifically with the competencies required to perform the Field Consultant roles described previously. These competencies included:

1. The ability to train administrators and teachers in the rationale for and the use of RBS individualized and personalized instructional and management training materials;

2. The ability to diagnose problems of implementation and apply appropriate resources to a solution of the problems;

3. The ability to communicate effectively with the client-user in order to effectuate a suitable working relationship;

4. The ability to establish and maintain a working relationship with key members of the client system in order to facilitate change appropriate to the client's goals;

5. The ability to accurately assess and report the degree of implementation of curriculum for purposes of field-oriented inquiry.

The methodology employed to train Field Consultants in these competencies were primarily experiential. The staff was divided into small groups and placed in Network school sites to learn administrative training procedures from experienced school principals. Other sites were used for internships in the operation of instructional programs. In-house time was spent in small group feedback and discussion sessions.

The first phase of the training program was evaluated through pre-test/post-test methods in cognitive subject matter, and through self-assessment in terms of job preparedness. The second phase of training, being mainly experiential, was evaluated by on-site observers of trainee behavior and, again, by self-assessment of learning progress.

As stated earlier, an important feature of the RBS training program for Field Consultants is on-going training. As the functions and tasks of the Consultant change and the responsibilities grow to include more functions, training programs are designed and incorporated into the workscope to prepare the staff for these new functions. For example, when it became clear that the role should include the investigation of phenomena related to the adoption and implementation of change, new skills in observation, interview techniques, and report writing were required. Staff skills were assessed and training provided to develop these competencies.

IMPACT OF THE FIELD CONSULTANT ROLE

Effectiveness of training is best measured by the consultant's performance in the field. Three means of evaluating the consultant's impact have been used: 1) joint travel to field sites between supervisors and Field Consultants, 2) evaluative data collected by survey of client-users, and 3) analysis of data collected by the Field Consultant in the course of his investigation of change phenomena. The following presentation summarizes the findings of these activities.

Evaluation of the Role and Performance through Joint Travel

Joint trips were made in May, 1973, for the purpose of assessing subjective aspects of the role such as:

-- effectiveness of consultant/client working relationship
-- effectiveness of consultant on-site problem diagnosis and resolution strategies.

It was found that of these two aspects of the role, the first was stronger. That is to say, the consultants were able to establish harmonious and constructive working relationships with teachers, principals, and central office personnel. The consultant was highly respected for his general knowledge of the curriculum programs and for his ability to offer sound advice to teachers and administrators on the use of the programs to achieve their goals of individualizing and personalizing instruction.

The second aspect -- diagnosis and problem-resolution -- was a more complex problem. It was clear that failures of implementation were sometimes difficult to correct because of a multitude of variables

over which an external agent can have little influence. Problems such as limited funds hindering full implementation of an innovation are, in most cases, problems over which principals and administrators have little control, let alone an outside consultant. In such cases, the Field Consultant was limited to providing information about funding sources, and to a more limited extent, assisting with proposal preparation.

Another kind of problem, in which the diagnosis was possible but the development of resolution strategies near impossible, had to do with political and organizational realities of the client's setting. In some cases, implementation and diffusion were attenuated by community, school staff or central office dissatisfaction with the school leadership or with the innovation being implemented. When the difficulty lay with innovation matters, i.e., implementation or evaluation, the consultant would intercede on the client's behalf, if asked to do so; however, he was not always viewed by the adversary as an objective arbitrator but often as an advocate of the innovation under fire.

These kinds of problems made clear the limitations of the Field Consultant role, and led to certain revisions which will be discussed later in this presentation.

Evaluation of the Role through Perceptions of Clients

In the spring of 1973, the educational lab decided to assess perceptions of the role and functions of Field Consultants held by the Network principals and the consultants themselves. Areas of concern included: the nature of the consultant role; how often the consultant

should visit the school; the most effective mode of communication between the school and consultant; how consultant time should be spent in the school; activities in which the consultant has been most effective; activities the consultant should perform as liaison between the school and RBS; the importance of rapport between the consultant and school staff; how the consultant can assist the school with central office staff; critical competencies needed by a consultant; and additional activities within the role of consultant.

It was felt that assessment of perceptions held by principals and consultants would help guide the lab in planning future consultant activities. Additionally, points of disagreement between principals and consultants would provide areas for future inquiry and investigation.

Two groups of subjects, principals and consultants, were asked to complete a questionnaire designed to assess their perceptions of the role and functions of the consultant. Each of the 80 principals in the RBS Network of School Districts was invited to participate in the study. These principals had all received consultant support from RBS for at least one school year. An initial mailing of the questionnaire was returned by 55 principals. All RBS Field Consultants completed a similar questionnaire.

Results of the survey indicated that while the two groups of subjects concurred on most aspects of the role, principals tended to veiw the functions of RBS Field Consultants as curriculum-specific. This was not a surprising finding in that the consultant's activities with schools had been, for the most part, related to matters of implementation of curriculua. Principals found the consultant effective as trainer and diagnostician of program weaknesses.

Consultants on the other hand saw their role as broader than servicing the individual building. Their self-perception incorporated aspects of change agentry including district level planning, dissemination, and diffusion.

Further investigation, including obtaining the perceptions of central office personnel, is called for in order to put the role in clearer perspective.

Evaluating the Role through the Study of Change

The role of the Field Consultant as participant-observer in field-oriented inquiry can be evaluated by the utility of the studies and reports completed. In 1973 four studies were conducted: two on implementation and related variables, one set of case studies on ten Network School Districts, and one pilot study on 26 variables related to planned change. The objective of these investigations was to learn as much as possible about the variables which impinge upon or lead to the successful adoption, implementation, evaluation, and diffusion of innovation in the classroom and at school district management levels.

While it is not the purview of this paper to present a lengthly analysis of these studies, it is appropriate to cite some of the findings of the implementation studies, which relate most specifically to the consultant's role.

The Implementation Studies

Assessment of the level of implementation of an innovation must be an element of the evaluation of outcomes. Not to know whether a program of change is actually installed according to user and/or developer obj-

ectives invalidates findings attributed to the innovation. The problem of effectively measuring degree of implementation led to two implementation studies of IPI Mathematics and Reading.

The first study sought to assess relatedness between degree of implementation and eight variables: administrative climate, innovativeness of the school, staff attitude, student attitude, continuous teacher training, school/community relations, district/school involvement, and number of years involvement with RBS. To quantify this data two assessment instruments -- the Consultant Diagnostic Instrument (CDI) and the School Profile -- were employed.

The CDI is an observation instrument used by the Field Consultant to periodically assess degree of curriculum implementation in the classroom. The instrument was developed at RBS by evaluators, curriculum writers, and field staff trained in observation techniques. It comprises two sections, one on school organization and the other on instructional elements of the curriculum. The School Profile was developed to provide the consultant with a vehicle for contextual and qualifying descriptors of the school according to the eight categories listed above.

For purposes of the study, a total number of positive item responses from the CDI was used as the dependent variable -- degree of implementation. The CDI implementation scores were correlated with the eight independent variable scores from the School Profile. For each Network School, the Field Consultant assigned a point rating of 1 to 5 for every item relating to the School Profile variables. A stepwise regression was then used to show correlations between the eight independent variables and degree of implementation.

Significant correlations were found between the total number of positive responses on the Math CDI and innovativeness, administrative climate, continuous teacher training, staff and student attitudes. No significant relations were found between Math implementation and school/community relations, district/school involvement and number of years of involvement with RBS.

Significant correlations were found between the total number of positive responses on the Reading CDI and innovativeness, staff attitude, and school/community relations. No significant relationship was found between IPI Reading implementation and the other five variables.

There were several implications of these findings but they were attenuated by the study's limitations in methodology and instrumentation.

The data indicated, for example, that neither the community/school relations, the district/school relations, nor the duration of the RBS/school involvement had any influence on the degree of implementation of IPI Mathematics.

A factor to which the School Profile was not sensitive is the nature of the RBS/school district relationship at the time of the study. The Field Consultant's activities and tasks were, at that time, focused primarily on implementation matters in each school and only secondarily on developing school/district involvements in adoption, implementation and diffusion of change programs.

A more critical limitation had to do with the quality of the instrumentation and led to the second implementation study.

The second implementation study was conducted using a refined CDI and focused on assessing degree of implementation of IPI Mathematics and Reading in 31 RBS Network Schools.

The CDI data were coded by school and region and tallied in categories of school organization, testing, prescription writing, classroom management and planning, and student self-management goals.

Mean scores were calculated on categories by schools, and population means and standard deviations across regions. Correlation coefficients were calculated between related items on the CDI and between Math and Reading for all schools. "Within" and "between" region variance was not calculated statistically due to small sample sizes within the ten regions.

The study was limited by two important constraints. First, statistical analysis of variance between and among regions was confounded by the fact that only one consultant was responsible for a given set of schools. Thus, differences between regions may have been attributable to differences in consultant use of the CDI. This was felt to be a constraint even though the measured interrater reliability of the instrument was 85 percent.

The second constraint was the unfactored effect of multiple users within a given district who may have influenced the degree of implementation from one building to another.

The data presented in the report indicated that at least 45 percent of CDI read implementations were of a high level. The limitations of the study, however, preclude using these data to define degree, level or quality of implementation in any generic sense.

Both of the implementation studies were largely disappointing inasmuch as the effective measurement of implementation of innovations is a problem of particular interest in the context of evaluation of

program effects, and at this time few definitive answers are available as to how that measurement can best be accomplished.

The utility of the role of the RBS Field Consultant as observer, interviewer, and reporter was immeasurable in these studies and suggests that interventionist/change agent role models can feasibly and validly be expanded to include the function of change phenomena investigation.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper was to describe the role, training, and impact of the RBS Field Consultant operating in the Network of Schools/Districts during 1972-73.

The role model was a modification of several interventionist/change models from the literature on change. The change agent's role is to facilitate organizational change through assistance with problem solving, decision-making, and decision implementation. The Field Consultant performed a linkage role between research and development and product users, providing training and technical assistance in product implementation and diffusion.

The training of the Field Consultant was designed to develop competencies in establishing and maintaining working relationships with clients, training teachers and administrators, effectively diagnosing and prescribing for difficulties of implementation, and studying change related phenomena.

The impact of the consultant role was measured by feedback from clients and by studies conducted on problems related to implementation of innovations.

CONCLUSION

Research for Better Schools, Inc. is a young organization with many features of its character not yet solidified. One of these features is the role of the Field Consultant which, while formulated in accord with existing change agent models, has in many ways "just growed". The "just growed" model of change has obvious limitations when it comes to accountability, or when it comes to definitive research and theory building. We have learned from the experience, however, that some kind of interface between research and development and client-users is required. Many strategies have been devised and applied to this need with varying degrees of success. The model described in this presentation, too, has strengths and weaknesses; and in some cases, the strengths are also weaknesses.

It is a strength to represent a particular view of change, i.e., the product as a solution to school needs; it is also a weakness in that no one solution can adequately meet all needs. It is a strength to advocate changing schools through changing individual classrooms and individual school buildings; however, it is clear that central offices and state departments of education are mighty forces of influence on the adoption and maintenance of change. And it is a strenght to provide technical assistance as required by the client, but the effective change agent is striving to work himself out of employment.

To answer these and other questions, RBS is re-directing its field services and change strategies. It is anticipated that increased attention will be paid to developing linkages between research and

development and other educational agencies and systems seeking to bring about change in schools. The single school building approach will be augmented by systematic planning for change with central school district officers, intermediate and county units, and state departments of education. Such a strategy would move the Field Consultant role from implementation assessment, training, and studying the phenomena of change related to his role to a model more like that described by Argyris:

> "To assist a system to become more effective in problem-solving, decision-making, and decision implementation in such a way that the system can continue to be increasingly effective in these activities and have a decreasing need for the intervenor." (1970:16)

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